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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to examine preservice teacher beliefs about disciplinary situations in the classroom. The issues affecting the relationship between preservice teachers and classroom discipline are addressed through the following methods: (1) solicitation of major disciplinary problems encountered during the student teaching experience; (2) investigation of existing attitudes and beliefs about pupil-teacher relationships; (3) clarification of the relationship between these attitudes and maintenance of disciplinary problems; (4) application of cognitive restructuring procedures to existing irrational beliefs; (5) role playing of specific disciplinary situations; and (6) clarification of techniques designed to facilitate behavioral change and generalization to the classroom. An analysis of the responses to the Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory showed that 93 percent of the longitudinal scores were low with regard to harmonious relationships between preservice teachers and students. The results suggest that preservice teachers lacked security about their ability to teach and did not have enough time to learn and apply effective teaching skills. In addition, the preservice teachers lacked general work experience as well as teaching experience in multicultural environments and their role expectations and ethics about teaching were not well defined. (Author/JCD)

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRESERVICE TEACHERS ATTITUDES AND CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE: A PROGRAM MODEL AND CASE PRESENTATION

By

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRESERVICE TEACHERS ATTITUDES AND CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE: A PROGRAM MODEL AND CASE PRESENTATION

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this article is to examine the beliefs of preservice teachers regarding disciplinary situations in the classroom. It details an attempt to consider and address these issues through the following methods: 1) solicitation of major disciplinary problems encountered during student teaching experience; 2) investigation of existing attitudes and beliefs about teacher-pupil relationships; 3) illumination of the relationship between these attitudes and maintenance of disciplinary problems; 4) application of cognitive restructuring procedures to existing irrational beliefs; 5) role playing of specific disciplinary situations; and 6) illumination of techniques designed to facilitate behavioral change and generalization to the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

What to do to maintain classroom control continues to be a primary concern for preservice secondary teachers. In the "good old days" punishment and fear were the major methods of maintaining discipline. Today, a variety of additional strategies have been incorporated including behavior modification, teacher-parent conferences, detentions, reconstruction of the enviroment, etc. However, the earlier as well as contemporary approaches, wheather negative or positive, have neglected to focus upon preservice teachers pre-existent beliefs as to what constitutes disciplinary problems in the classroom and how these beliefs are related to the actual occurrence of disciplinary problems. Unless these beliefs are considered, and incorporated, any approach runs the risk of not being sufficiently specific for teachers' needs.

The purpose of this article is to examine the beliefs of preservice teachers regarding disciplinary situations in the classroom. It is a detailed attempt to consider and address these issues through the following methods; 1) solicitation of major disciplinary problems encountered during student teaching experience; 2) investigation of existing attitudes and beliefs about teacher-pupil relationships; 3) illumination of the relationship between these attitudes and maintenance of disciplinary problems; 4) application of cognitive restructuring procedures to existing irrational beliefs; 5) role playing of specific disciplinary situations; and 6) illumination of techniques designed to facilitate behavioral change and generalization to the classroom.

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PROGRAM MODEL

The following organizational design facilitates the methods just enumerated.

Procedures

1. Consult with school counselor for psychometric and intervention assistance.

2. Collect data about existing disciplinary situations in the classroom.

   a. Distribute index cards to student teachers requesting the description of a major disciplinary problem.

   b. Collect index cards and reserve for later processing and role-playing.

3. Administer a teacher attitudinal survey designed to sample opinions concerning pupil-teacher relations.

4. Instruct preservice teachers in rational thinking techniques (See Ellis & Greiger, 1977).

5. Extract underlying themes occurring in descriptions of discipline situation.

6. Evaluate and discuss results of the attitudinal survey. Show how this relates to existence, perpetution, maintenance, and approach toward disciplinary problems.

7. Apply rational thinking techniques, i.e., cognitive restructing as a method of modifying attitudes.

8. Role-play specific disciplinary problems described by preservice teachers.

   a. Initial role-play should depict the way the individual preservice teacher would ordinarily handle the situation.

b. Solicit feedback from the group of preservice teachers concerning alternative ways to handle the situation.

c. Reply the situation incorporating cognitive restructing techniques and resulting attitudinal and behavioral changes.

9. Discuss generalizations gleaned from the role-play and methods that would facilitate their application to the classroom situation.

CASE PRESENTATION

In the Spring 1978 semester at the University of Virginia, fourteen (14) senior undergraduate students were enrolled in the course titled Social Studies Methods and Student Teaching in Secondary Schools. This course was designed to provide preservice teachers with an applied teaching experience. A methods class was held daily during the first four weeks and students were taught numerous social studies curriculum and instructional techniques. Beginning the fifth week they started their student teaching experience in middle and senior high schools in the vicinity. Subsequently, the methods class met on a weekly basis to address major insturctional as well as management concerns encountered by individual class members. Responding to the request of several students to schedule a session focusing on discipline in the classroom, a mental health facilitator was contacted to assist during this presentation. Prior to the consultation, the facilitator requested that each student complete an index card describing the major disciplinary

problem encountered during the student teaching period. A verbatim listing of the problems identified is presented below:

1. Joe is constantly mouthing off -- mainly for attention. He will make an attempt at any question I put to the class, he will generally make a wild guess, and this often causes a class uproar. He talks extremely loud whenever he talks.

2. One student saying assignment is dumb or too hard and he won't do it. Affects other students and they don't want to do assignment either.

3. Two kids (boy and girl) playing with each other (hands in pants: hitting). Denied accusation of behavior.

4. Child pushing and man-handling other kids in the class. He picks on smaller students, punches and twists arms. He usually does this when the teacher is out of the room.

5. I have a student who is very friendly, i.e., too familiar with me. He thinks nothing of putting his arms around me, etc.

6. How to handle too much talking-not paying attention in class. Group of kids in a corner of the class talking and laughing -- bothering the rest of the class.

7. Excessive talking. If I let up for one minute the class is gone -- out of control. Example, a discussion without a reward (grade) that is on a piece of paper is looked upon as useless and the class does not participate in teacher planned activity and pursues their own.

8. An underachieving, very intelligent and verbal high school junior who constantly complains about his being required to study U.S. history, and evades work. Placed on independent study, he continues to be an irritation. He disrupted the class on one occasion -- entering in the middle of the period, yelling at me.

9. One student in my team made a threat to hit another student in the hall. After being told to go to his next class, he yelled and slammed the door of the room.

10. Ninth graders seem to have the desire to throw things and shoot rubber bands. This isn't as bad during class as it is before the late bell rings. Problem starts in hall outside class and the students just seem to bring it into class with them.

11. Problem of small talk going on during class, no big problem, though.

12. Third period, a large, noisy group refuses to calm down enough for any class activity. They throw cans, hit each other and call me names.

At the beginning of the seminar we administered the Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory (1951). This multiple-choice test was used to assess attitudes regarding pupil-teacher relationships. High scores indicate constructive attitudes while low scores indicate the adverse. Analysis of the data revealed the following corresponding percentile scores:

Raw Score	Percentile Score
103	92
65	45
62	40
62	40
57	32
46	18
46	18
38	11
32	8
31	8
28	7
28	7
23	5
5	1

These results reveal that 93% of the class ranked at the lower end of the scale while 7% ranked at the high end of the scale. The breakdown is as follows:

Standard Deviation Units About Norm	% in Sample
1 Above	7
1 Below	7
2 or more below	65

This can best be explained by contrasting high scores with low scores. The assumption is that a score at the high end of the scale indicates that a teacher should be able to maintain a state of harmonious relations with his/her pupils characterized by mutual affection and sympathetic understanding (Cook, Leeds, Callis, 1951). Under these conditions fewer disciplinary problems should arise because the teacher likes teaching, and the student likes learning. Theoretically the teacher and student work together in a cooperative endeavor. This allows for the acknowledgement of strengths and abilities as well as for the supportive acknowledgement of deficiencies, without damaging self-confidence in the teacher or the student.

Conversely, a score at the low end of the scale reflects a disharmonious relationship between the teacher and student, characterized by mutual dissatisfaction. That is, the teacher may not be rei[illegible]d by teaching, and the student may not be motivated by learning. Under these conditions, a "teacher supportive" classroom enviroment (supportive of the needs of the teacher, rather than the student) prevails rather than a "student supportive" classroom enviroment. Some manifestations of a teacher supportive classroom enviroment are sarcasm, ridicule, and defensive positions. Disciplinary problems would be common.

Summarily, given the obtained results, it comes as no surprise that disciplinary problems are frequent occurrences with the preservice teachers in this sample.

In that the existing attitudes have resulted in disharmonious teacher-pupil relationships, and consequently a high incidence of disciplinary problems, it seems reasonable to expect that some intervention aimed at positively changing the attitude could potentially promote harmonious relationships and subsequently reduce the incidence of disciplinary problems. Continuation of the existing attitudes would only serve to maintain the current disciplinary problems. With this in mind rational thinking and cognitive restructuring procedures were instituted.

A basic introduction to rational emotive principles of behavior was given (See Ellis and Grieger 1977). Essentially, this approach stipulates that activating events do not automatically trigger or upset an individual. Rather the individual's belief about the event triggers or upsets the individual, i.e., an event does not directly cause an emotional or behavioral consequence, rather one's belief does. To the degree that the belief is irrational, one can expect undesirable emotional and behavioral consequences, e.g., feeling overwhelmed by the lack of discipline in a classroom and potentially giving up in dismay. To the degree that the belief is rational, one can expect desirable emotional and behavioral consequences, e.g., certainly frustration at the lack of classroom discipline but taking positive steps to learn methods of effective discipline. Cognitive

restructuring is the process whereby one becomes aware of the thinking patterns yielding ineffectual behaviors (e.g. ineffectual handling of disciplinary problems) and changes these patterns to more productive ones. Cognitive restructuring entails detecting and disputing irrational beliefs in an attempt to reframe (redefine the situation and foster desirable behavioral consequences, e.g., effective handling of disciplinary problems and eventual decrease in their occurrence).

The preceding activity was designed to provide conceptualization for attitudinal and behavioral change. The role-play activity was structured to provide behavioral feedback and modeling components. This was seen as an opportunity to enable the preservice teacher to demonstrate her/his way of dealing with the situation, receive feedback from peers, observe an experienced professional model, and finally integrate these into an approach that would be simultaneously effective and compatible with his/her interactional style. The process was as follows:

1. Role-play the situation depicted on the note card and behave as you normally would in the classroom.
2. Receive feedback from peers as to alternative ways to handle the situation.
3. Observe professional model role-play similar situation.
4. Evaluate and discuss numbers 1-3 above.
5. Reply situation integrating information obtained.

This exercise generated much discussion, insight and confidence in alternate ways of coping with disciplinary

situations. At this point each student was required to develop an action strategy designed to facilitate generalization of learned principles back in the classroom.

SUMMARY

In that the obtained attitudinal scores for 93% of the class were low with regard to harmonious relationships, it came as no surprise that many of the preservice teachers were experiencing disciplinary problems in their classroom situations. Attempts to account for the low scores led to the following speculations:

1. The preservice teachers lacked security about their ability to teach. This easily lends itself to remediation in methods courses. Such courses can ideally include but are not limited to the following:
   a. Didactic presentation of teaching techniques -- how to's
   b. Role-play techniques/skills involved in effective classroom management.
   c. Opportunities for peer feedback in role-play activities.
   d. Exposure to experienced teachers consisting of observation/supervision in an actual classroom for one semester prior to student teaching.
   e. Realistic approach to classroom management considering preservice teachers' perspective as well as theoretical models.
2. It was early in the semester; perhaps not enough time lapsed to facilitate the learning and applying of

teaching skills; e.e. develop a teaching skills repertoire. Given additional time, these skills would likely emerge. The deficit could be seen as one of experience rather than one of ability.

3. An insufficient amount of preservice course time is devoted to the relationship between interpersonal relationships and teacher-student motivation, discipline, classroom climate, etc. The insufficiency could be corrected through emphasis on individual behavior and group dynamics.

4. The preservice teachers had a lack of general experience in multicultural enviroments, let alone teaching experience in such enviroments. Effective teachers must be sensitive to students from diverse cultural, economic and social orientations. Preservice methods courses provide an excellent forum for teaching and modeling this desired sensitivity and expansion of cultural awareness.

5. There was a general confusion about professional role expectations and ethics of teaching. Cooperating teachers are invaluable in the reduction of this confusion. They serve as both instructors and role models. Continuous in-service training programs should be provided for cooperating teachers to insure that they maintain the knowledge necessary to train the preservice teachers. The confusion can also be reduced if preservice teachers make informed selection of teaching as a preferred career. It is not unrealistic to screen potential preservice teachers for their intention to teach as this impacts both their motivation to teach and their classroom attitudes.

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